

REVIEW



Thanom Kittikachorn

THAILAND: THE UNWANTED CATALYST

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Thammasat University, 11 am: 'I don't care how many were killed... They deserved it.'

OCTOBER REVOLUTION

PART II

Bangkok: Almost three years to the day after a students' uprising toppled the military dictatorship of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, a group of "high-ranking military officers" calling itself the Administrative Reform Council (ARC) seized power in Thailand last week in order to "forestall a communist plot backed by the Vietnamese," and to preserve the "Thai Monarchy forever."

Radio Thailand announced that the ARC had placed the country under martial law, suspended the Constitution and banned political parties and imposed rigid censorship on the press. The military also announced that "all Thai and foreign-language newspapers would be banned until further notice" and that Radio Thailand would be the only media allowed to broadcast the news. All Marxist books are to be banned.

The announcement was signed by former supreme commander of the armed forces Admiral Sa-ngad Chalawyo, who was also the defence minister before the coup in the former prime minister Seni Pramoj's Cabinet, which was approved by King Bhumibol only 24 hours before the takeover. The only other member of the ARC announced so far is Air Marshal Kamol Dechatungka, current Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and head of the National Security Council.

Adm. Sa-ngad also announced in his first speech broadcast as head of the ARC that "democracy had become unworkable because of serious divisions within the Democrat Party..." He also said that "it is well known that when the new Government was formed, some pro-communists were allowed to join it." The whereabouts of former prime minister Seni were unknown.



Thailand correspondent Richard Nations, who filed this story, and an in-depth analysis of the events leading up to the October 6 coup.

Adm. Sa-ngad announced that the ARC would try to overcome the obstacles to democracy which had stood in the way of the previous government. The coup came in the wake of a massive police assault on the Thammasat University which left at least 30 dead and more than 100 injured.

"I don't care how many of them were killed... They deserved it once they insulted the royal family." This proverbial barometer of public opinion, the taxi-driver, was talking about the 30 university students who died in the bloodbath following the police assault to clear demonstrators from Bangkok's Thammasat University on October 6.

"They can do anything, but not insult the royal family. That's sacred." This correspondent found no one on the streets of Bangkok who would disagree with him.

The students' claim they had no intention of insulting the royal family and that the whole grisly episode was the result of mistaken identity. Whatever the intentions, however, the resem-

blance of one of the student actors to the Crown Prince in a mock lynching brought out the full fury of the police and blood-lust of the right-wingers who lynched, burned, and clubbed to death any student they could lay their hands on.

The skit was held on October 5 during a left-wing student rally to demand the expulsion of former dictator Thanom Kittikachorn who slipped back into the country three weeks ago to enter the Buddhist monkhood "to make merit for my family." According to the students' account, the mock lynching was aimed at dramatising the death of two labour union activists (REVIEW, Oct. 8) whom the Police Director-General had just admitted were lynched by his own officers.

The right-wingers claimed the leftist students were hanging the Crown Prince in effigy and demanded that the Prime Minister, Seni Pramoj, break up the demonstration, arrest those responsible and indict them for *lèse majesté*. The Prime Minister appeared on television to announce he had called for a full investigation.

By 7 am on October 6, however, the Thammasat campus was surrounded by police and right-wing activists. The leaders of the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) had already left the campus, where some 2,000 demonstrators had spent the night, to surrender themselves at the Prime Minister's house. Prime Minister Seni, however, was not at home and the assault on the campus had already begun.

Claiming they had been fired upon by heavy weapons from within the campus, the police called in reinforcements. By 7.30 am hundreds of police, including special riot squads, the border patrol and units from the Crime Suppression



Thammasat, noon: Five hours of blood-letting.



Division, lined the streets outside the university compound. They were armed with M-16s, carbines, grenades, M-79 grenade-launchers, and recoilless rifle anti-tank weapons.

The marine police patrolled the Chao Phya River along the western border of the university grounds.

At sporadic intervals, massive firepower was directed into the campus at a rate approaching 1,000 rounds a minute. But despite random shots from inside the university that sent the street mobs hurtling to the ground, the actual fire from within the university was minimal.

By 7.45 am the police had smashed through the main gate of the university and poured into the sports ground in the centre of the campus. Neither I nor any other eyewitness I spoke to saw any evidence of students holding defensive positions against the police. There may have been student snipers with automatic weapons, but there was almost no response from the buildings where thousands of students took shelter from the massive firepower poured in by the police.

Meanwhile, the right-wing vocational students and Red Guards — an ultra-rightist group — poured into the campus

behind the police. They were armed with staves and metal bars. The blood-letting began as they roamed the university grounds, clubbing to death any student they found.

I saw one university student emerge from the auditorium unarmed only to be swamped by the mob and kicked and beaten to death with bottles, mangled chairs and jagged bits of metal torn from the main gates. Other students who tried to escape were hanged from the trees outside the campus. Later, their bodies were doused in petrol and burned. At least one girl was reported to have drowned among the many who tried to swim across the river to safety.

The police were now moving from building to building flushing the students out. Hundreds of students were brought out stripped to the waist — girls included — and were made to crawl on their stomachs between two rows of police. No one restrained the frequent blows of rifle butts directed at the students' naked heads and backs as they crawled along the ground.

The right-wingers cheered wildly from the stands lining the sports field where the police had laid the students face down on the ground. Waving the national flag with ghoulish delight, the

mobs sang patriotic songs and chanted "death to the communists."

One student found inside the NSCT office by right-wing looters was beaten to death and dragged from the building with a noose around his neck, while others ran behind cheering and clubbing his inert body.

Although there were doubtless some left-wingers armed and holding down sniping positions on the rooftops, the overwhelming majority of students were defenceless. I saw no evidence in the building where the students were holed up of anything but incoming fire from the police. For instance, there were no spent shells to be seen among the blood-stained rubble and broken glass in the classrooms which had been devastated by anti-tank shells and massive volleys of small-arms fire.

The police had used no tear gas in an effort to dislodge the students unharmed.

Moreover, once stripped and face down on the ground, the beatings and abuse did not cease. I saw police kick and beat the students and strip the Buddha images from their necks, "because communists are not Buddhists."

By noon on October 6, more than four hours after the assault had begun, the majority of the left-wing students had been flushed from the buildings and calm prevailed. More than 1,700 students had been arrested and driven away in buses to be held in a special detention centre where they were to be tried under martial law for *lèse-majesté*.

As the police formed up and marched away from the campus, they were greeted by wild cheers from the crowds lining the streets. Seven hours later, a military coup was announced and martial law proclaimed.



Bare-chested left-wing students: 'Death to the communists.'



Seni Pramoj: Called for an investigation, but too late; Admiral Sa-ngad: Out of retirement to seize power. PHOTOS: AP

Thanom: The unwanted catalyst

THE entire Thanom Kittikachorn episode reads like a leaf from the Buddhist folk-lore dear to religious Thais: An evil prince of power, repentant for his former unenlightened life, renounces the world to make merit as a monk. As he steps forward to receive the alms of those who fell before his previous tyrannies, so now even governments fall before his virtues.

Just how much merit was involved in the return from exile of the former military strongman Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn to enter the monkhood in Thailand?

Just how was it that one Buddhist monk generated so much political turmoil? Few observers doubted that the former dictator's political base was all but washed up. The military appeared as confused and divided over Thanom's return as did everyone else. And even the student and labour leaders who demanded his immediate expulsion from the country admitted they considered Thanom a tired old man with little personal political ambition.

If anything, Thanom's return should have provided Prime Minister Seni Pramoj with a superb occasion to demonstrate the security not only of his own Government, but also of parliamentary institutions as a whole. It would have mattered little whether Seni chose to be noble by acquitting Thanom, or firm by dismissing him into exile once again, so long as he acted with appropriate aplomb and self-confidence.

But the Thanom affair inspired little aplomb among Thai politicians, and considerably less self-confidence. The long-festering divisions in the ruling Party broke into open schism. The barracks were awash with acrimony as senior officers plunged into intrigue.

Thanom by himself of course was harmless. But few political Thais believed the former dictator acted on his own. Indeed, his return to Thailand was the climax to a sequence of strange events with obscure political motives. His professed aim of making merit for his ailing father was preceded by the mysterious return of his former deputy, Field Marshal Prapas Charusathira, with the plea: "I am going blind, I want to see Thai doctors. I want to die in my own country." And press reports began to surface which claimed that Thanom's son, Narong, the third member of the ruling triumvirate which was toppled in 1973, was living off charity in "heart-rending poverty" in West Germany.

Moreover, each episode in this already two-month-old serial of the *émigrés* was punctuated by Left-Right confrontations in the streets as well as swift power re-alignments behind the scenes. The whole effect was to numb the political public with a prolonged crisis of confidence that eroded faith in democratic government itself. Any change — even a thinly veiled form of authoritarianism — might have been greeted with relief among the same Thais who overwhelmingly welcomed the de-

mocratic revolution three years ago.

However, it would be simplistic to assume that each step in the Thanom-Prapas melodrama unrolled in accord with a grand conspiracy to change the face of Thai politics. "One of our problems just now is precisely that we don't have anyone who could conceive and execute such a brilliant masterpiece of intrigue," one prominent Thai editor said with little irony. But if, indeed, there was no one grand conspiracy centring around the old exiles, there was unquestionably a bewildering turbulence of mini-conspiracies thrown up in the wake of their return.

For the second coming of Thanom and Prapas not only laid bare the power vacuum in Thai politics, but also rudely exposed the contradictions in Thai democracy and confirmed that the question of who should take power, raised by their exile three years ago, remained unanswered. These questions went deeper than the perennial ones of which faction or party should plunder the spoils of office: They concerned whether democratic institutions in Thailand could construct a forum where new classes could share in power, or merely throw up another storefront for traditional bureaucratic absolutism, military or otherwise.

The full significance of Thanom's return lay in the circumstance of his departure three years ago in the face of unprecedented mass uprisings led by the students against military rule. The version of those events that has since become established makes Thanom and Prapas out to be the villains by ordering the troops to fire on the unarmed demonstrators to secure their monopoly of power. It was the late General Kris Sivara, who had just taken over as army commander-in-chief under Prapas, who

disobeyed orders to suppress the demonstrators with the oft-quoted words, "They are our children, they want democracy. We cannot shoot them."

Lieutenant-General Prachuab Suntrangkoon, then director-general of police and close to Kris, also played a crucial role in the October events by ordering 500 police off the streets so as to avoid a clash with the demonstrators.

Seeing army unity in shambles and turmoil in the streets, the King intervened to prevent the conflict escalating to civil war. He personally asked Thanom and his two deputies, Prapas and Narong, to step down, while Kris arranged their exile.

EVERY major political event needs its own heroes and legends; and Gen. Kris was certainly one of the most imposing to emerge from Thailand's October 1973 uprising. His influence ran like a thread through many of the crucial turning points in the country's subsequent attempts to establish democracy: As the supreme commander under the caretaker Sanya Dharmasakti government, Kris personified the professional soldier loyal to the democratic constitution; on retirement he won the political struggle with rival Pramarn Adireksan, then Defence Minister, to secure his own list of promotions in the military. Many observers saw Kris' hand behind the intrigue that brought down the Kukrit Pramoj government last January and the subsequent April general elections resulting in a massive right-of-centre majority led by the Democrats.

When Seni Pramoj formed his first Cabinet, Kris was promised the key post of Defence Minister in the Democrats' political deal.

On the whole, Kris played the role of constitutional general with consummate skill. His enormous influence acted like a guarantee of the post-October '73 order, not only in the military but also across the board. "Kris' influence spread everywhere — from the right-wing descendants of Thanom's UTPP [the former government-sponsored United Thai People's Party] through the military to the Socialist Party and labour unions on the Left. He stood above them and used his influence not to dominate but to orchestrate some sort of stability in the turmoil," a diplomat told the REVIEW. "After Kris' death you could see relations between the generals and politicians unravel in a series of petty crises."

Indeed, Kris' totally unexpected death even before Prime Minister Seni could form his first Cabinet, removed the key-stone in Kris' own delicately constructed bridge between Parliament and the barracks. With hindsight, there were at least two reasons why Kris' political handiwork was rapidly undone. First, he chose not to follow up his rise



Thanom, Kris, Prapas: Who did what to whom?



to supreme commander under the civilian governments of Sanya and Kukrit with a thorough purge of his enemies in the army — those with close personal and political ties to the *ancien regime* and who were growing impatient with civilian rule.

Kris preferred the longer-term approach of gradually advancing a few of his own men over the heads of Prapas' former clients. This avoided open confrontation and preserved the show of unity in the army. But it also resulted in a delicate factional balance between his own men, the non-political career officers, and those who remained loyal to the old order and irreconciled to the new democratic one.

Secondly, along with the civilian politicians who took over from the students, Kris failed to have the popular version of events established through due process and government commissions that looked objectively into the events of October '73. As a result, his death was followed not only by a revival of the Prapas faction in the army, but also a revision of the accepted October history that portrayed the Kris men as the defenders of democracy and the people, and Thanom and Prapas their bloodstained oppressors.

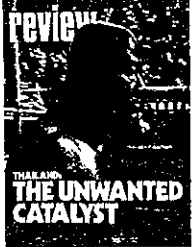
With the return of the exiles Thanom and Prapas, a long-suppressed account of the October days began to surface according to which the student movement was manipulated by Kris in a powerplay to replace Thanom. Moreover, neither Thanom nor Prapas — according to this account — gave orders to fire on the demonstrators. There was even a pamphlet circulating in the barracks which reportedly put the blame for the deaths of some demonstrators on Kris' own men.

"The Kris faction in the army saw the return of two of the triumvirate — ousted three years ago — as a play to oust themselves," one diplomat observed.

Indeed, reliable sources close to the military claim that the Kris men got wind soon after Kris' death that the time was thought opportune by their opponents to bring back Thanom: The political pendulum had swung decisively right in the April elections for the first time since October '73; the Left were on the defensive under a blistering anti-communist press campaign orchestrated by the ultra-Right; but, most important, the biggest barrier to Thanom's return in the past, Gen. Kris, was no longer around.

According to this account, plans were made to bring back Thanom early in July or August, entering the country to reside first in a monastery in the south.

"Kris' followers, particularly Lt-Gen. Vitoon Yasawdi — the one who





escorted Thanom aboard his flight into exile — acted first by conspiring with certain politicians to bring the more unpopular Prapas back and create the uproar that would both spoil plans for Thanom's peaceful re-entry and put the seal once again on their exile," a diplomat told the REVIEW. "It's really not as improbable as it sounds," and certainly other sources close to the military have confirmed Vitoon's role in Prapas' return.

IMPROBABLE or not, it was Lt-Gen. Vitoon, accompanied by some armed men, who reportedly went after Prapas once he slipped back into the country. According to more than one reliable source close to the military, Vitoon's intentions were either to kill Prapas or hold him in custody to ensure his exile when the time was thought right.

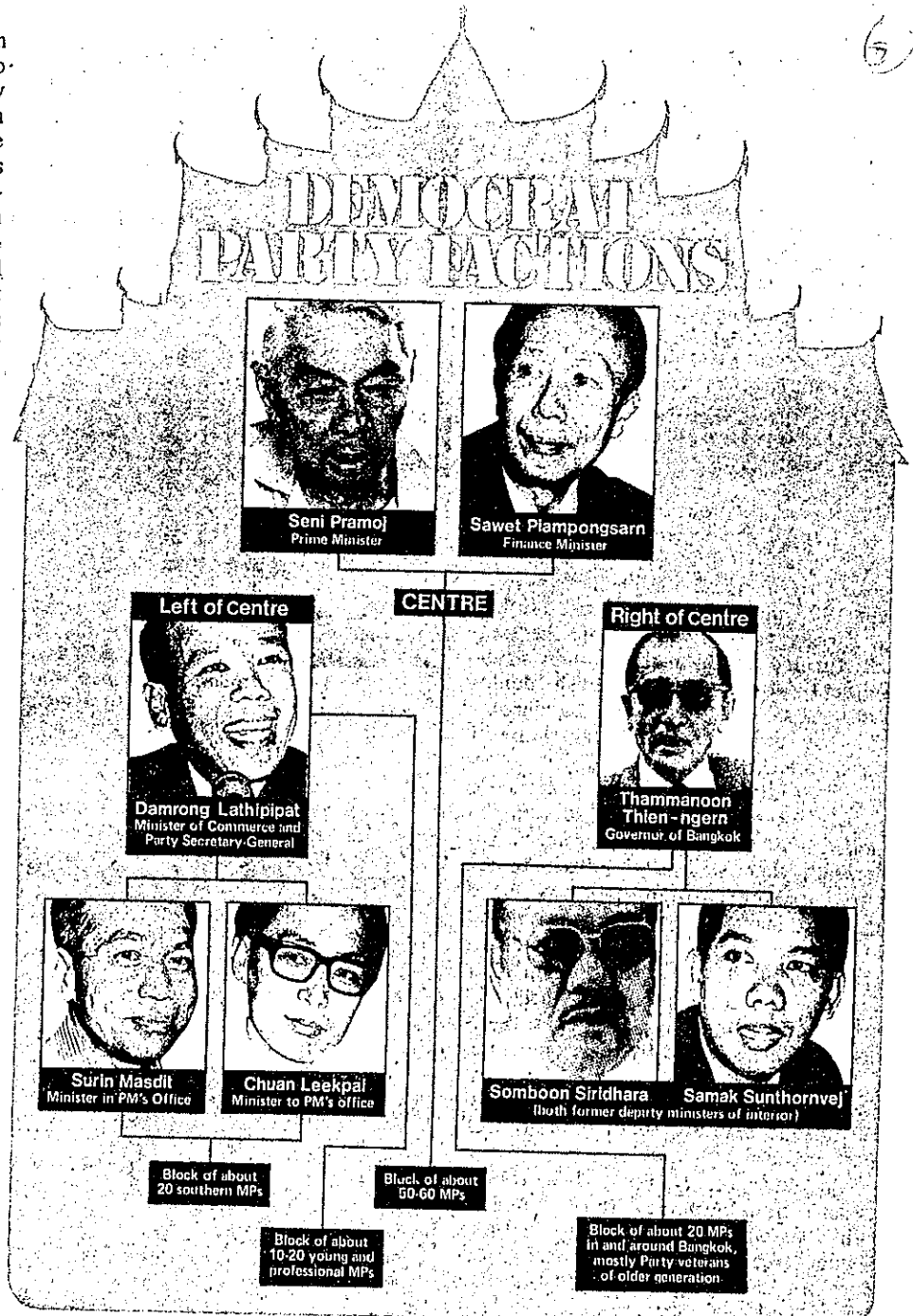
Prapas' family, however, according to these accounts, informed Lt-Gen. Yos Thephasdin — one of Prapas' in-laws and former clients. Yos, backed by his own troops, arrived at Prapas' Bangkok hide-out in time to forestall Vitoon and take Prapas into the protective custody of the First Army then under Yos' command.

It was this head-on clash between the Prapas and Kris factions in the military that underlay Prime Minister Seni's remarkable equivocation over the Prapas affair. The Cabinet reversed itself no less than three times before Prime Minister Seni announced off-handedly, "there are times when the Government simply cannot control the military."

However candid the Premier's remark may have been, it hardly obscured the obvious: An army warring within itself should have been all the more vulnerable to the pressures of a united parliamentary leadership. But Seni could not control the squabbling generals mainly because he could not control the squabbling political barons that made up his Party and coalition Government.

Even before Prapas' return, the coalition was deeply split between the liberal wing of the Democrats and everyone else in the coalition who stood to their right. However, the gulf then extended to the split between the factions on the political front and those in the military. For a re-establishment of Thanom and revision of the October '73 story would have levelled as disquieting a threat to those who gained power under democracy as it did to those who won out under Kris' army promotions.

The longer the crisis lasted, the theoretical division between an authoritarian army and a democracy became more pronounced. Parliament was supplanted by a division running down the



The delicate balance of the Democrat Party just before the military stepped in to take power away from the civilian government

middle of both, and right through the heart of both Prime Minister Seni's old and new governments. The new alignments which emerged from the Thanom crisis put the left-wing students on the streets behind the Kris faction in the military and the liberal wing of the Democrat Party all on the side of deporting the old generals immediately and preserving the democratic status quo. On the other side of the issue stood the anti-Kris men in the army, the Democrat conservatives and right-wing coalition parties on the political front and the ultra-rightists in Navapol, the vocational students, the police and the monasteries.

The logic behind the splits and align-

ments was to be found in neither ideology nor Party programmes. The far Left of Thai Parliament was only mildly Fabian. Across the board, Thai political parties had subscribed with varying emphasis and sincerity to a moderate capitalist reformism. Nor were King, religion and nation the exclusive monopoly of the Right, for there are few Thais who do not hold these in genuine esteem. Indeed, anyone who was thought to be on the wrong side of these loyalties would be totally alienated from the mass of Thais. Moreover, a recent anti-communist campaign waged through the armed forces' radio made it clear that any form of dissent could be identified with communism and disloyalty to reli-

gion and the royal family. And yet despite a surface uniformity unparalleled in Asian politics, even petty issues sparked an acrimony sometimes bordering on near hysteria.

The answer to these riddles lay in Thailand's political tradition of bureaucratic absolutism. From 1932 when power was seized from King Prachathipok, it passed through numerous coups between thoroughly interchangeable sections of the small bureaucratic ruling class. The remarkable thing is that the Thai elite were able to settle differences among themselves without drawing the masses into politics. If Kris did use the students against Thanom as has been alleged in certain circles, he broke tradition.

The Thai students' October '73 uprising may well seem small beer to other Asian elites for whom mass movements have been commonplace for more than half a century. But for the deeply conservative Thai establishment it came as a shock. Many of the old-guard politicians who spent much money in democratic politics were ambivalent towards stu-

foreign capital and serves the communists."

Underlying all such differences, however, the real issue dividing the Left and Right was the role of the army in the power balance. For the right-wing parties - Chart Thai, Social Justice, Social Nationalists and the conservative faction of the Democrats - a strong alliance with the army was considered the only conceivable counter-weight to an elected Parliament vulnerable to the radical pressures of "mob rule" - the student-worker alliance in the streets.

For the Left - the parliamentary socialist parties, New Force, organised labour, the National Student Centre of Thailand and the liberal Democrats - a strong army was a threat to their power under an elected Parliament. Kukrit Pramoj, the former premier, stood in the middle, willing to use both army and students against each other to push his reforms beyond the opposition of both. Kukrit therefore proved an unreliable ally for the military. So when he ran in the army constituency of Dusit, the

point a faction of leftist Democrats even threatened to march in the streets with them. Nor was it surprising that the liberal Democrats found common cause with the Kris men in the army. Not that the Kris faction was unflinchingly loyal to democracy, having once approached the liberals to give the leadership to a coup they were planning. They were refused. But both gained from the post-October '73 order, and had much to lose from any reversal.

Conversely, the conservative Democrats under Bangkok Governor Thammamon Thien-ngern and the right-wing coalition partners had consistently pressed Prime Minister Seni to take a soft line on both Prapas and Thanom. Samak Sundaravej, former deputy minister of interior and spokesman for the radical Right, was suspected to be deeply involved in Thanom's return. Samak was known to have strong lines out to the anti-Kris men in the army. He visited Thanom in exile in Singapore shortly before press reports spread of his imminent return.

Samak was the *bête noire* of the Democrat liberals and the only man in the Party they could not tolerate. "We have to get rid of him," one liberal said flatly. And indeed, the factional struggles provoked by the exiles' return seemed at one point to have tilted in favour of the liberals who were able to squeeze Samak out of the Cabinet.

However, Samak's decline in the Party hardly resolved the conflicts between Left and Right.

Larger battles over Thanom's return remained to be fought. And every day the Thanom crisis continued, public confidence in democracy slipped further.

Many people saw an even more sinister force at work in these events to prepare the public mood for a bloodless changeover to a "guided democracy" which would revert to bureaucratic rule.

But then October 6 dawned, and all predictions were washed away in an orgy of bloodshed. The unwanted catalyst, Thanom Kittikachorn, may have made merit for his ailing father (his professed reason for returning to the country), but he also lit the flame that engulfed a nation in the most bitter confrontation since he himself was toppled from power in October 1973.

It is now believed that if the military can overcome the divisions within itself, it will seize power for good, declare a martial law government, and initiate a crackdown on the Left generally. If the military remain divided however, the way could be clear for civilian politicians to introduce some form of guided democracy.



The Thai military: Can it overcome divisions?

dent power. They backed the students in the break-up of the army's old monopoly of power, but few were willing to share it with organised labour, the farmers, or whoever the people elected as their representatives in Parliament.

"There is a strong sense of being 'born to rule' in the Thai establishment," a diplomat observed, "and anyone outside that close little circle of kinship and school ties is looked upon literally as a communist agent, the mob, or disloyal to the King and the nation's religion."

One young Democrat put the matter concisely in contrasting the approach to popular demonstrations of Democrat liberal leader Damrong Lathipipat with that of the right-wing party leaders: "He [Damrong] always told us when there is trouble go and investigate . . . talk to people . . . see what the problem is. It's the only way to find a solution. The right-wingers, though, don't want to listen to anybody. They do all the talking. They can't tolerate labour unrest which they think only drives away

army-backed Democrat, Samak Sundaravej, won the poll and emerged as the parliamentary spokesman of the ultra-Right.

The Government which Seni Pramoj formed last April was the first to have a significant left-wing influence through the liberal faction of the Democrats. This was why, despite its stable four-party structure and control of nearly three-quarters of the votes in the House, the Democrat Government withered under the strain of ceaseless in-fighting. Every issue was compromised by a power struggle between the liberal Democrats and the conservative Democrats, who were often aligned with Chart Thai and Social Justice.

But it was the return of Thanom and Prapas that concentrated, in one issue, all the contradictions between Left and Right in the Democrat Party and coalition. At every turn, the liberal Democrats under Commerce Minister Damrong Lathipipat pressed for the expulsion of the old dictators. They tacitly aligned with the students, and at one



standing and sympathy between Thailand and her immediate neighbours." This, in any case, was the direction which his Chinese hosts would like Thailand to take. The message that Kukrit got from Chairman Hua, Hao Teh-ching, Director of the People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (what Kukrit calls an alternate foreign ministry), and Han Nien-lung, Deputy Foreign Minister in charge of Southeast Asia, is that "China wants a firm friendly relation with Thailand and from that China would like to see peace in Southeast Asia." He confirmed that Peking had agreed to lend its "good offices" to work for peace between Thailand and its leftist neighbours Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos — "especially Cambodia."

NO MEETING: Kukrit denied he had secretly met the Cambodian Premier Pol Pot and said the presence of the two in Peking at the same time was just an "accident." He did admit to having learned about Cambodian thinking from the Chinese, who were confident that if China and Thailand became good friends the problem with Cambodia could be solved very easily.

While China would like to see a change of attitude in Bangkok, it also appears to have urged moderation on Phnom Penh leaders. Kukrit says that "during their visit to Peking both Pol Pot and Ieng Sary [Cambodia's Deputy Premier in charge of foreign affairs] probably had a kind of sensible talk with the Chinese leaders and it has given them some sort of change of view . . . they probably received some very moderating influence from the Chinese leaders."

(In fact, on October 24, Radio Phnom Penh broke its nine-month silence on Thailand and mentioned the meeting between Ieng Sary and Thai Foreign Minister Upadit Pachariangkul at the United Nations. On its part, the new military regime has retained Upadit in the post despite the dismissal of the Tanin cabinet.)

As Kukrit sees it, the problem between Cambodia and Thailand is basically that of unmarked borders — a legacy of history. A good beginning was made, he says, when in 1975 Ieng Sary, sent by premier Chou En-lai, visited Bangkok, and established diplomatic relations. "We were all very friendly, very chummy and then Pichai [Rattakul] came and carried on with the good work. Everything stopped when Tanin, that funny little man, turned up." The deposed Tanin, he says, "is so absorbed in fighting communism that he does not know what he is doing. He mixes up foreign affairs, foreign relationships, with doctrinal struggle."

Kukrit says with a hearty laugh: "Tanin was made to be a Pinocchio of the army but he turned out to be Frank-

enstein's monster." He is confident that with Tanin gone, Thailand's relations with Indochina will improve rapidly — in particular, full diplomatic relations will be established between Bangkok and Hanoi "within the very near future." The border committee between Thailand and Cambodia at Poipet could also be revived.

Kukrit also took a rather relaxed view of the recent Soviet delivery of 10 MiG-21 jet fighters to Laos. "I don't see anything wrong there." Then he added: "What can Laos do with the Soviet MiGs except to fly around? They have not got any petrol. I mean, after all Thailand is Laos' OPEC [Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries]!"



Adm. Sangaad and Gen. Kriangsak (right): Good-humoured.

The military muscle in

By Richard Nations

Bangkok: After a year of Prime Minister Tanin Kraivixien's crusading anti-communism, the same generals who backed him 12 months ago overthrew his government early on the evening of October 20 in the name of liberalism at home and detente abroad.

The first announcement by the new Revolutionary Party — almost to a man the 23 generals who seized power on October 6 last year as the National Administrative Reform Council (NARC) — promised press freedoms, the lifting of martial law and return to open politics, general elections in 1978, and a new approach to the diplomatic deadlock with Indochina.

The tone of the coup was in sharp contrast to that of October 1976. None of the tension and fear that followed in the wake of the Thammasat University riots last year was apparent in this often nervous capital when 150 troops occupied Government House at 6 pm to detain the Cabinet. People in Bangkok were for the most part indifferent.

The first speech by Revolutionary Party Chairman, Rear Admiral Sangaad Chaloryu, read like a liberal counterpoint to the stern and doctrinaire tone of deposed prime minister Tanin's first nationwide address last year: Tanin then dwelled on the "dangers of communism which seeks to instil hatred and conflict

in society." Sangaad, however, emphasised that Tanin's 12-year timetable for a return to democracy was "too slow" and "not in accord with the wishes of the people."

The Revolutionary Party's first press conference, the following day, was marked more by good-humoured relaxation than hard questioning or apprehension.

Adm. Sangaad, who was chairman of the NARC and defence minister in the Tanin Cabinet, surfaced as the Chairman of the new party, with Supreme Commander General Kriangsak Chamanand (National Peace-Keeper) and army commander-in-chief General Sernan Nakorn (Peace-Keeper of Bangkok) completing the triumvirate.

This year's coup was no better planned than the last, and the ruling triumvirate that emerged from it was the result of an 11th-hour compromise which failed to resolve the conflicts in the military that kept Tanin in office far longer than most had expected.

This time, though, the conflicts in the military arose over not whether to remove Tanin, but how. A year of Tanin's McCarthyism at home convinced key generals that Thailand's elite would not long survive alienating the press, labour, students, politicians, and even the bureaucracy. Bloody border clashes

with Cambodia, hostile propaganda from Hanoi, and a bad press in the US were ascribed to Tanin's cold-warrior posture towards communism. And his anti-corruption drive threatened the vested interests of some generals' cozy relations with corrupt bureaucrats and local big business.

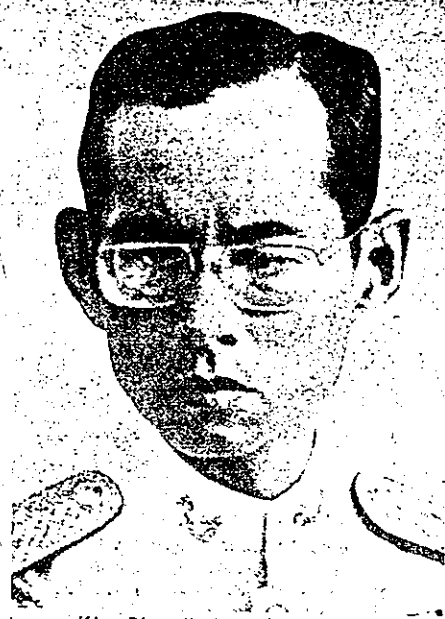
But above all, Tanin had learned over the year to exploit the divisions within the military itself to force through policies which many on his Military Advisory Council thought ridiculous if not disastrous. The former prime minister's most embittered opponents were a group of field-grade officers who became known as the "young turks" because of frequent criticism and challenges to his Cabinet which Tanin faced down with support from Adm. Sangaad and the navy.

Even though Tanin alienated the army, King Bhumibol opposed an open military takeover for fear of demoting Thailand's image abroad to that of a "banana monarchy." Sources close to the Palace claim the King would only countenance smooth and constitutional changes of government. But the dictatorial 1976 Constitution had no provisions to allow Cabinet changes, and Tanin adopted the tactic of backing all his ministers so the Cabinet would have to stand or fall as one.

TWO POLES: The only way out seemed to be to embarrass Tanin into resigning. And after the military appointments at the beginning of October raised Gen. Kriangsak to Supreme Commander, two clear poles of power emerged. Privately, Gen. Kriangsak made no secret of his distaste for Tanin's policies. Personal quarrels between the two became more heated early last month. These differences at the top were reflected in small street demonstrations against Tanin in September and October. And the ultra-rightist activists, young turks and liberal newspapers aligned against Tanin in the name of the monarchy.

But the strategy of attrition was too slow for the impatient young turks who initiated the chain of events that led to last week's coup. On October 14, the Friday before the coup, a group of young officers led by Lieutenant-Colonel Prachak Swangchitr, the "hot spurs" of the young turks, met at Bangkok's 4th Armoured Division headquarters and drafted an ultimatum demanding the resignation of seven Cabinet ministers. Some sources say General Yos Thephasdin, deputy commander-in-chief of the army, carried the message to Tanin who rejected it. Over the weekend, army commander-in-chief Serm and Adm. Sangaad reportedly tried to persuade Tanin to bend. He refused.

None of the key power-brokers in the upper ranks of the army can afford to



King Bhumibol: Broke tradition.



Tanin: 'Quit or else.'



Gen. Serm: Persuasion.

be on the wrong side of the battalion commanders who control the troops. In the past, however, Serm, Yos and Kriangsak have managed to evade the cleft between the young turks and the Palace over Tanin's resignation with a last-minute compromise. But this time the rupture between Gen. Kriangsak and Tanin was too deep.

Gen. Kriangsak backed the young turks' ultimatum by calling the Prime Minister to a heated session at the Supreme Command on Tuesday morning, October 18. Tanin was told either to reshuffle the Cabinet or resign. He refused. Unconfirmed reports say that Kriangsak then went to Tanin's office in Government House the following day, and warned him of the coup if he remained intransigent.

According to the same account, even Serm and Sangaad threw their support behind the coup when on Wednesday night the Palace refused an audience to Tanin. The gesture was taken as the King washing his hands of the matter.

Twenty-four hours later, Tanin and his Cabinet were deposed.

But the new power alliances in the army — Kriangsak, Yos and the young turks — were quickly camouflaged by an attempt to return to the old formula of a civilian leader — Sangaad is retired — with the military in the background. But the compromise appeased neither side and began to become unravelled within a week.

Sources close to the Palace say the King was unhappy with the coup. When Adm. Sangaad approached the Palace for the traditional post-coup blessing, he was received coolly. According to this account, the King turned his back on him and said simply: "I wish you all well."

Three days later, the King broke tradition by wearing a business suit to a royal ceremony honouring his ancestor, King Chulalongkorn. Protocol demands ceremonial half-dress. The gesture was interpreted by some of Thailand's well-informed aristocracy as a symbol of

disapproval of the new authorities.

Nor are the young turks happy. Adm. Sangaad backed the Cabinet against them in past feuds and they fear he, too, will turn into another Tanin in time. On October 24, Prachak led another delegation to Gen. Serm's house in a bid to push the coup to its conclusion, remove all frontmen, and bring the army up front under a constitution that would ensure that the civilian cabinet would take orders from the military and not just accept "advice."

On the same day, the announcement of a civilian cabinet and an interim constitution was postponed and a "temporary" administrative reorganisation was set up. Adm. Sangaad remained leader of the Revolutionary Party, but Gen. Kriangsak was put at the head of a "secretariat" that grouped the government ministries under various "directorates." Informed observers viewed it as another compromise which was bound to crumble. All the vital questions raised by the



TROOPER GUARDING STUDENTS ARRESTED AFTER THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY MASSACRE BLOODED LEFTIST STUDENT BEING HELPED TO AMBULANCE

THE WORLD

THAILAND

A Nightmare of Lynching and Burning



Suddenly the nightmare that Bangkok had dreaded was happening: a wild outbreak of kicking, clubbing, shooting, lynching. Youths hurled themselves into the river to keep from being shot. Then the blazing finale as a heap of gasoline-soaked bodies were set afire. Finally, over the radio came last week's terse announcement: "The government cannot govern," said a voice. "To keep Thailand from falling prey to the Communists and to uphold the monarchy, this [military] council has seized power. The country is under martial law."

The voice was that of stately, thick-set Admiral Sangad Chaloryu, 61, who just two weeks earlier had retired as armed forces supreme commander and planned to spend his time raising orchids. Said Chaloryu: "You can sleep peacefully tonight. You do not need to live in fear any more."

Judging by the right-wing junta's first decrees, Thai politics indeed appears headed for a kind of sleep. Within a day, 3,000 suspected leftists were rounded up and herded into detention camps. Political parties and any gathering of more than five persons were banned; newspapers, magazines and broadcasts were placed under censorship; and membership in Communist organizations was made punishable by death after trial by courts-martial. A midnight-to-dawn curfew was established on the night of the coup, then dropped—after revelers who ignored it were shot. Constitutional rule will even-

tually be restored, said Sangad, but only "when the nation is ready for it."

When that might happen is anybody's guess. A mild monarchy under the rule of the figurehead King Bhumibol Andulydej, Thailand is best notable for its democratic tradition and for its periodic military putsches and bottomless corruption. Yet at the height of the Viet Nam War, the U.S. shipped squadrons of bombers and some 50,000 troops to this California-size land, making it a fortress of American power. As the war in neighboring Indochina began to wind down, riotous Bangkok students overthrew Dictator Thanom Kittikachorn in 1973 and ushered in a neutralist government that requested U.S. withdrawal. Then began a series of shaky coalitions assembled by pinnings of Thailand's 54 parties. Now TIME's David Aikman cabled, the collapse of Thailand's three-year experiment in democracy was received with widespread relief, for the nation had been teetering on the brink of chaos.

Wild Buffaloes. The new trouble started last month, when ex-Dictator Thanom, after three years of exile in the U.S. and Singapore, slipped back to Bangkok with the saffron robes and shaven skull of a Buddhist monk. His mission, he said, was to do penance at the deathbed of his 91-year-old father. Leftist students at Bangkok's Thammassat University refused to believe it. They demanded that he again be expelled and gave Prime Minister Seni Pramoj a

RIGHTIST BATTERING LYNCHING VICTIM

The Traveling Ted And Bill Show

The diplomatic act that some journalists in Africa call "the Traveling Ted and Bill Show" hopped around the continent last week—from Maputo to Dar es Salaam, Lusaka to Pretoria, Salisbury to Pretoria again, and on to London. Through it all, Britain's Minister of State for Africa Edward Rowlands and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs William Schaefe were smiles that occasionally seemed frozen on their faces. "I think we have a measure of agreement," chirped Rowlands. Added Schaefe: "We are clear of all difficulties, and now the end should be achieved." Sure enough, at week's end the British government announced that the conference to set up an interim government in Rhodesia, first step in the transition to black majority rule, would be convened next week in Geneva.

The only trouble was that the parties involved—the white Rhodesians, the black Rhodesians, the five "front-line" Presidents of Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana and Angola—had sharply differing ideas of what the conference was supposed to accomplish. "Rowlands and Schaefe seemed to be trying not to offend or differ with anyone," said a Western diplomat in Tanzania. "Their idea seems to be to get a conference going, and then hope that things will work out simply because everyone is in one room."

Power Sharing. A week earlier, black and white leaders appeared to have agreed in principle to the "Kissinger plan," formulated during the U.S. Secretary of State's recent trip to southern Africa, to bring about black rule in Rhodesia within two years. But they disagreed as to what the plan specifically was. As spelled out in public by Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith, Kissinger's formula would set up an interim government in which whites would share power with blacks—but would remain dominant during the changeover.

Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere, most influential of the front-line Presidents, challenged this view, insisting that black majority rule must come immediately. Mozambique's President Samora Machel, host to the largest band (5,000 to 8,000) of Rhodesian guerrillas, said he would continue to support "armed struggle by the gallant freedom fighters of Zimbabwe [the black African name for Rhodesia] until the day independence is achieved." Ian Smith was grouching that Kissinger's package deal included an end to guerrilla warfare and international sanctions. To make matters worse, after a week-long conference in Mozambique, Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, rival leaders of nationalist factions, claimed to have cemented

deadline of Oct. 2 to act. The frail, silver-haired Seni, newly appointed to head another coalition, vacillated.

Though Thammasat University had been closed, 4,000 students broke down the gates and occupied it. Some staged antigovernment skits; others secretly brought in guns. The students were supported by 43 Bangkok labor unions, which gave the government their own three-day deadline for Thanom's ouster. After that, they threatened, there would be a general strike.

But Thailand's conservative forces, now fearful of the nation's steady drift to the left and its vulnerability to pressures from its Communist neighbors, fought back. Police seized two students who were putting up anti-Thanom posters and summarily hanged them. Several thousand right-wing vocational students known as "Red gaurs" (wild buffaloes) demanded that the left-wing students be ousted from the university.

A student skit triggered the final crisis, and the coup. Selecting a youth who resembled Thailand's Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, 24, the leftists staged a mock hanging. Gruesome pictures of the charade were splashed all over Bangkok's daily papers that night. By dawn, an enraged mob of 10,000 rightists armed with rifles, swords and clubs began attacking Thammasat. They were met by M-16 gunfire and

PRIME MINISTER SENI SHORTLY BEFORE COUP

grenades. Then the troops moved in.

Spearheaded by a dump truck that smashed through the main gate, Thai paratroops, border guards and marines rushed in. Peppering the buildings with small arms fire, grenades and anti-tank shells, the soldiers swept through the campus. The toll: 41 dead (only two of them police) and 180 injured. "They were out for blood," said one Western newsman who had covered the war in Viet Nam. "It was the worst firefight I've ever seen." Huddled in terror on the central soccer field, student captives were stripped to the waist and kicked around by swaggering soldiers. Shoes, watches, eyeglasses and golden Buddha medallions were confiscated. The wounded were left to bleed—drawing flies in the noonday sun, while military doctors awaited "instructions" from their commanders.

A few desperate students managed to escape by the Chao Phya River at the rear of the campus. Others who ran for the streets were set on by the rightist mob. Several were beaten close to death, then hanged, or doused with gasoline and set afire. One was decapitated. The bodies of the lynched victims strung up on trees were mutilated by rioters, who gouged out their eyes, slit their throats and lashed at them with clubs and chains.

Radio Omens. From Thammasat, the mob moved on to Government House, where a tearful Seni Pramoj, who may well have known about the military's plans, offered his capitulation. "I did my best," Seni told the crowd. "I tried to keep law-and-order in this kingdom, but if you wish, I will go." The military, after taking power, promptly installed Supreme Court Justice Tanin Kraivixien, 49, as the new Prime Minister.

At week's end the junta was apparently in control of Bangkok, but it faces dangerous threats. Communist guerrillas are active in Thailand's northeastern provinces, and Radio Hanoi has denounced the coup as a plot between "American imperialists" and Thai "reactionaries." It was an ominous signal for a nation from which the remaining U.S. forces pulled out just last July, leaving the Thais to their own devices.

PRIME MINISTER SENI SHORTLY BEFORE COUP



PRIME MINISTER SENI SHORTLY BEFORE COUP





DESAI (RIGHT) & FELLOW OPPOSITION POLITICIANS MEETING IN NEW DELHI
 ended again by a gifted tactician with a surprise.

India as a land committed to the path of reconciliation, peace and progress." Mrs. Gandhi made it clear that, for the time being at least, the state of emergency would continue. But she pledged to restore substantively those political freedoms on which we were compelled to impose some curbs," so as to allow a free campaign. A few days later, she formally ended domestic press censorship (already been eliminated) and ordered the state governments to release all political prisoners.

A gifted tactician, Mrs. Gandhi not only stunned the electorate but once again confounded her opponents. Morarji Desai, 80, the wily leader of the Congress Party and an implacable foe of Mrs. Gandhi's, suddenly found himself released from jail only a few hours before Mrs. Gandhi's broadcast. The relatively short campaign period he complained, "puts a hardship on the opposition. But I am sure that the sudden declaration of an election will benefit not the Prime Minister but the nation." Declared Piloo Mody, secretary of the Indian People's Party: "I am happy about the long overdue election. I hope the government will lift the emergency and put MISA [Maintenance of Internal Security Act] in the garbage."

Now? There was something that gave Mrs. Gandhi's critics pause. Why had she decided to hold elections now? One reason, perhaps, was that opposition had indicated it was time to end the disruptive tactics that had led the Prime Minister to declare a state of emergency in the first place. But a more important reason was that India's economy has rarely been in such a shape. Food grain stocks, follow-

ing two bumper crops, are at an alltime high. Foreign exchange reserves, which are now more than \$2 billion, are three times what they were two years ago. Moreover, prices fell sharply soon after the emergency was declared, although they have begun to rise again lately.

Thus Mrs. Gandhi can argue that India never had it so good as when the nation was under the discipline of the emergency. In addition to economic progress, she can point to improved labor relations, abolition of rural debts and bonded labor, and a more efficient bureaucracy. Said she last week: "Anyone

can see that today the nation is more healthy, efficient and dynamic than it has been for a long time."

The opposition will have difficulty disputing this claim and may be reduced to campaigning chiefly against a repressive rule that is now, after all, largely suspended. Moreover, Morarji Desai and his fellow challengers must contend with the fact that the governing Congress Party has won every national election since India became independent in 1947. One of the main reasons for this consistent success has been that the opposition parties have long been victimized by ideological differences and widespread disunity. This time the opposition will be further handicapped by a lack of funds and the disarray in its grassroots organizations caused by the prolonged imprisonment of party members and leaders.

To overcome these difficulties, four groups—the right-wing Hindu Jana Sangh, the conservative Indian People's Party, the Socialist Party and the Old Congress Party—announced that they will form a united front and run a single slate of candidates to prevent fragmentation of the opposition vote. Said Desai: "We are interested only in getting a thumping majority." But the betting is that Indira Gandhi will once again do the thumping.

THAILAND

War Against the Night

Winding through narrow jungle roads, a platoon of Thailand's crack 1st Cavalry Battalion was caught last month in the bloodiest ambush yet staged by the country's Communist insurgents. Twenty-two of the unit's 26 men were quickly cut down in a fusillade of rocket grenades and heavy machine-gun fire. Seizing the platoon's weapons and ammunition, the Communists set the dead bodies afire with gasoline, then slipped back into their jungle cover.

The war in Indochina is not over. It has merely moved to a new battleground—Thailand. Prime Minister Tanin Kraivixien now calls the long-smoldering (at least eleven years) insurgency by Communist guerrillas the gravest threat to Thailand's internal security. Long ignored by Bangkok, the increasingly bold Communist attacks have become a focus of concern in the 3½ months since the military's National Administrative Reform Council swept aside Thailand's wobbly democracy (TIME, Oct. 18). In their armed struggle against Tanin's military-backed government, Communist guerrillas have killed more than 90 soldiers and police since October; unofficial estimates go much higher, though the government does say that an average of one local official is assassinated every four days.

The coup provided the Communists



PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI
 The power of the people.

with their biggest influx of recruits in a decade: an estimated 600 to 1,000 student leftists who fled Bangkok and began training in "liberated" zones and in neighboring Laos. It also polarized Thai politics. "Before the coup," says one Thai counterinsurgency expert, "there were four channels open to anyone with a complaint: Parliament, the newspapers, government officials and the Communists. Now there are only two: the government or the guerrillas."

Interservice Rivalries. To assess the course of the sputtering war, TIME Correspondent William McWhirter traveled 1,400 miles through Thailand's most troubled provinces. So far, he reports, the 9,000 to 12,000 guerrillas of the Maoist-leaning Communist Party of Thailand have been confined to border regions. According to government estimates, the Communists control only 100 villages with a total population of 75,000. But nearly 10% of Thailand's 45 million people live in "contested" regions, many of them ruled by the government during the day and by the guerrillas at night. Twenty-eight of the country's 71 provinces are governed by martial law.

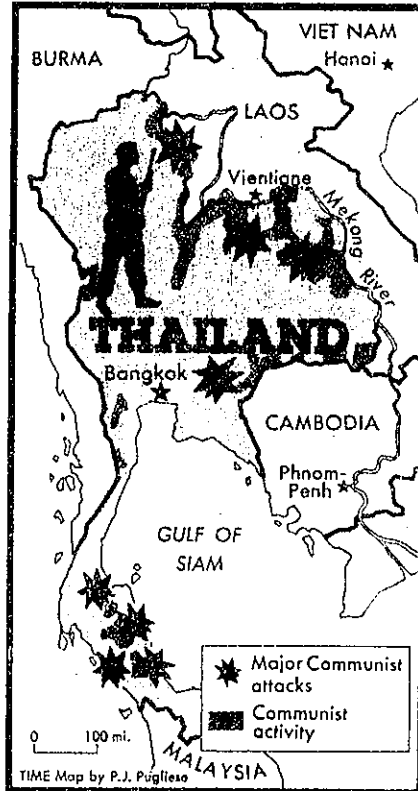
Although Tanin's government has committed 40% of this year's \$3.4 billion budget to the military and police, Thai efforts to push back the rule of the night are sometimes snarled and chaotic. There are bitter interservice rivalries, and undercover agents from different branches seldom pool their information. As a result, intelligence is spotty. Despite all this, Thai troops are performing well, and field officers continue to fight the "other war"—that is, gaining village support. Along the Mekong River, army helicopters rain propaganda leaflets on disaffected villages. The government has devised civic ac-

tion programs to rebuild damaged hamlets, and anti-guerrilla patrols are often accompanied by doctors who bring free medical care to the hill people. But there remain deep misunderstandings. One deputy chief of a village still labeled "pro-Communist," after having been burned out by Thai police and rebuilt with government aid, told McWhirter: "There was enough left over from the compensation to build the big Buddha image at the temple. Officials seem more polite. This village is ready to be pro-

government." Heavily guarded government teams are also hacking through the forested valleys of the northeast to bring goods from remote villages to market—and allow troops easy access for anti-guerrilla raids. In one of the heaviest such engagements, a Thai Malaysian force of 4,000 troops—first cooperative effort of this kind—waging a joint campaign backed heavy air and artillery strikes against the guerrillas' mountain strongholds in the south.

Government Reform. It is clear that the government needs all the grassroots support it can get. To engineer that Bangkok is relying in part on the activities of the nation's fastest-growing volunteer movement, the almost 1.5 million-member Village Scouts. Sponsored by the royal family, the scouts pledge loyalty to King, country and Buddha. Besides seeking local allies like the scouts, field commanders claim to have learned from the failures of the U.S. and the Thieu regime in Viet Nam. "If the Thai soldier is corrupt," says an army major, "then the Thais will lose the same way Laos and Viet Nam lost."

To avoid that, General Saiyud Kherdpol, director of the anti-guerrilla Internal Security Operations Command, has sketched a strategy for winning popular support. In a strikingly frank book, *Thailand's Future*, published last month, Saiyud concedes that military planners "always look at those who suffer and struggle for justice as Communists." He argues that the government must side with demands for reform in political, economic and administrative structures. Only by doing that, Saiyud feels, can the military undercut the insurgents' appeals and "keep the people from the influence of the enemy."



THAI TROOPER AT SOUTHERN BASE
Using bulldozers, Village Scouts, itinerant doctors and air strikes against what remains a shadow foe.



REPAIRING FREQUENTLY AMBUSHED ROAD

Peace Festival

Success against an insurgency

Each August the residents of the hamlet of Baan Nabua, 30 miles south of the Mekong River center of Nakhon Phanom, stop all work and open their stilted houses to visitors for a celebration. Government officials gather for a feast and an all-night spectacle that features classical Thai dancing and Kung Fu movies. The holiday is called the Stop the Gunfire Festival: it commemorates the government's success in quelling a Communist insurgency that once infested most of Thailand's 16 northeastern provinces. This year the eight-man band that played popular tunes at Baan Nabua was composed entirely of Communist defectors.

Government officials credit their achievement to aggressive rural-development programs, innovative military tactics and a healthy dose of Communist squabbling. To win the peasants to its side,



Communist guerrillas in southern Thailand crossing a jungle stream

The eight-man band playing popular tunes was composed entirely of defectors.

Bangkok provided new varieties of rice, and imported silkworms to stimulate silk production. Instead of staging massive military operations against guerrilla enclaves, the army intensified its psychological-war effort. "Before, when we captured a Communist, we just pushed him out of a helicopter," Major General Sudsai Hasdin told TIME Bangkok Bureau Chief David DeVoss. "But this use of force just gave the Communists a propaganda advantage."

Most important, Bangkok was helped by a falling-out in 1979 between Viet Nam and the Maoist Thai Communist Party. Hanoi expelled Thai guerrillas from their sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos and confiscated their weapons and ammunition. The Thai Communists lost a second ally soon after when China sought support for Cambodia's Pol Pot regime from the five members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to which Thailand belongs. ASEAN in turn

demanding that Peking minimize its relations with Southeast Asian Communist parties. As a result, it has sharply reduced its support of Thai insurgents.

To speed the process of decay in guerrilla ranks, the Thai government offers a generous amnesty program. So far this year more than 1,000 guerrillas in the northeast have defected. Those who defect are not asked to apologize or recant. They are generally given work on government construction projects or assisted with funds gathered by local merchants. Says Lieut. General Lak Salikupt, regional commander of the Second Army: "Persuasion is always more efficient than gunfire."

Bangkok has been far less successful in containing Communist insurgents in the deep south. In recent weeks, guerrillas there have blown up a railroad bridge, disrupted rail traffic to Malaysia and ambushed a police station. Unlike the northeast, where poor farmers were drawn to the Communists by promises of a better life, the south spawned guerrillas who concentrated their propaganda on gov-

Widening War

Pretoria flexes its muscle

South Africa has made no secret of its intention to step up military operations against the guerrillas of the West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and their bases in southern Angola. Last week the South African military command made good on the pushing air-supported ground force some 60 miles deep into Angola, fighting with Angolan troops, and bringing a 14-year-old bush war to a new and dangerous stage. The purpose of South Africa's latest incursion: to strike at rebel sanctuaries and supply bases in Angola, with the possible side effect of strengthening Pretoria's position in negotiating over independence for the territory of Namibia, or South West Africa, which South Africa has controlled since 1920.

The South African action was widely described by the Angolan government as an armed invasion, complete with armored vehicles and aircraft. Just before the South African force began to withdraw at the end of five days, the Angolans threatened to deploy against the incursion some of the estimated 20,000 Cuban troops based in the country. South African Prime Minister Pieter W. Botha called Angola's charges exaggerated, and the Angolan army not "interfered," he told Parliament, the incursion would have gone unnoticed, like others before it, a routine hot-pursuit operation against SWAPO guerrillas. At least ten South African soldiers were reported killed.

The raid drew strong international condemnation—except from the United States, France, Britain, West Germany and Canada, who with the U.S. have taken a leading role in trying to forge a United Nations-sponsored Namibia settlement. The U.S., for its part, issued a statement saying that the new South African action "must be understood in full context" of the struggle against SWAPO and emphasized the "urgent need" for a Namibia solution. U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim cut short his vacation in his native Austria and immediately returned to New York to prepare for a Security Council meeting, as demanded by Angola, on the incursion. By week's end heated exchanges had taken place in the Council, and one U.S. Administration official expressed concern that "further South Africa at the U.N. will just make it easier for the South Africans to claim that the U.N. cannot serve as an impartial arbiter on Namibia."

Pretoria was naturally heartened by Washington's position. Editorialized pro-government Johannesburg said: "We are grateful that America has shown a sense of balance about the Angolan invasion issue."